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ABSTRACT

To examine how knowledge of history and politics informs the early education and child care field, this paper identifies sources of historical knowledge and unexamined underlying presuppositions frequently held by early childhood professionals which, if allowed to remain unchallenged, contribute to professional burn-out, repeated frustration at perceived failure, and inappropriate responses to existing situations. These presuppositions concern: (1) the complexity of change and the nature of pluralism; (2) the view that history is dull, boring, and irrelevant, and (3) the idea that politics is "dirty," manipulative, and cynical. A second aim of the discussion is to show early childhood educators, caregivers, and administrators how the knowledge of their historical roots and their political context can enable them to become, not just capable advocates, but also more effective and successful workers at whatever job they do, whether it be as group teacher, head teacher, director, coordinator, administrator, professor, or policymaker. (Fifty-four references are provided.) (RH)

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Theme: "A Breath of Fresh Air"

1988 National Conference
Anaheim, California

10-13 November 1988

Advocacy: The early childhood historian's not-so-hidden agenda

by

Edna Runnels Ranck

History Seminar
Friday, November 11, 1988
2:30 - 5:30 p.m.
The Anaheim Hilton

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

"A Breath of Fresh Air"
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Advocacy: The early childhood historian's not-so-hidden agenda

by Edna Runnels Ranck

Purpose

Events of the last decade in the field of early education and child care have alerted parents, professionals, employers, journalists, and policymakers to the profound political and economic aspects of rearing children in the 1980s and the approaching 1990s. Recognition of these conditions, however, has not automatically produced a systematic confrontation of the issues within either the private or public arenas. Calls to advocacy activities fall on the ears of people who are either already extended in their professional lives or who are convinced that child and family issues belong in the privacy of the home and community, not in the board room or the halls of local, state, and federal legislatures. Requests for action only seem to demand extra efforts that may not lead to successful intervention, but only to frustration and apparent failure to change.

Do any of us here who have supported the passage of the Act for Better Child Care (ABC bill) doubt for a moment that another round of calls, letters and meetings awaits us with the beginning of the 101st Congress? To countermand the disappointment and discouragement experienced by this recent event and at many other times, this paper attempts to address two related conditions:

1. First, to show early childhood historians how their field of study

can promote advocacy activities as well as encourage professionals to function as advocates; and

2. Second, to show early childhood educators, caregivers, and administrators how the knowledge of their historical roots and their political context can enable them to become, not just capable advocates, but also more effective and successful workers at whatever job they do, whether it be as group teacher, head teacher, director, coordinator, administrator, professor, or policymaker.

Methodology

In order to examine how knowledge of history and politics informs the early education and child care field, the paper will address the following topics:

1. Identification of sources of historical knowledge about the development of early childhood programs and policies; and
2. Identification of some of the unexamined underlying presuppositions frequently held by early childhood professionals which, if allowed to remain unchallenged, contribute to professional burn-out, repeated frustration at perceived failure, and inappropriate responses to existing situations.

The paper will conclude with recommendations for the promotion of advocacy activities and for the means to become a more effective, successful worker.

Sources of Historical Knowledge

Primary source documents about childhood are difficult to locate: childhood by definition is a period of life during which children carry out routine activities day after day without recording thoughts, actions, or daydreams. Nor

do children or parents usually analyze behavior within the family circle. Documents such as drawings, paintings, and carefully printed thank-you notes rarely survive the momentary posting on the family refrigerator; few children create written documents until they are no longer children, and even then, adult memories of childhood may be vague, distorted, and amazingly selective.

There is one consistent source of information about attitudes toward and views of childhood that is available: the written laws of a given society (Grubb, 1985; Ranck, 1986). Laws pertaining to children's issues, studied over time, present not only a legal view of childhood, but also provide a description of the range of society's beliefs about children; reflect the conditions of the time prior to the initial law; and trace the progression of changing attitudes (Haskins, 1960).

To study laws pertaining to childhood, one must examine not only the recent laws of the state of residence and the nation, but also any precedents that existed. For example, to review the relevant documents for a state that was one of the original 13 colonies, the colonial and proprietary laws as well as English law must be examined as well (Ranck, 1986).

It is also essential that early childhood educators and caregivers be clear about a definition of history. All too often history has been taught to the next generation as a series of chronological dates and events falling in one after another without benefit of an examination of simultaneity, context, causation. A single event is the result of various forces, not all of them obvious, or even recognized, at the time it occurs. Historians, then are more than "custodians of the past" or "the memory of civilization" (Kammen, 1972, p. 13); rather, historians should be thought of as explorers of the "cognitive

stratum" from which all research begins (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 701); they are witnesses to "everything that undergoes change" ("History," 1920, p. 527); and they are the ones who "learn [and] know by inquiry" (History, 1971, p. 1311 [305]).

> Historical research in every field produces not a repetition of events and their assigned dates, but rather, provides us the legacy of an interpretation of the records of earlier occurrences for use in understanding more clearly the meaning of current events, with the intention of attempting to predict, prevent, or promote activity in the future (Ranck, 1986, p. 20).

Imbedded in the phrase "attempting . . . to promote activity in the future" is the fundamental idea that historical research can, indeed, must, lead to political activity, that is, advocacy for programs and policies for young children and their families. In the remainder of this section of the paper will be an overview of what is involved in gleaning historical knowledge about early childhood education and caregiving. By tracing roots and examining branches, we become more able to see the leaves that are created each season and to understand their purpose, meaning, and effect.

Identification of Children's Basic Developmental Needs and Adult Responses. One of the earliest descriptions of children's developmental needs is found in William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England (1793), in which are listed three categories of children's needs: a) welfare needs, b) maintenance (labor) needs, and c) educational needs. In our century these categories have come to mean the following:

a) Welfare needs of children include the fundamental and practical concerns associated with survival, normal growth, and protection from harm, so that children can grow up mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy; with adequate amounts and kinds of food, clothing, and shelter; with opportunities to develop

positive interpersonal relationships; and protected from abuse and neglect.

b) Maintenance or labor needs of children require the availability and acquisition of material goods, despite the fact that children are relatively powerless in contributing to the economic development of a nation. In all societies the acquisition of resources has depended on the performance of work, so that in instances where citizens have been unable to produce services or products, other means of allocating resources have had to be invented. Children, with their limited ability to work for compensation, have presented economic problems to societies, the solutions to which have enabled children to acquire resources, but often at a high personal and societal price.

c) Educational needs of children include the processes by which socially requisite skills are learned and necessary information is acquired. While skills and information are provided in various ways, every society must find the means by which to ensure the transmission of what is presently known and considered of value to members of the next generation.

The fundamental and persistent needs of children at all times and in all places become the foundation on which any given society constructs its responses:

> The moments which most affect the psyche of the next generation [occur] when an adult is face to face with a child who needs something. (DeMause, 1974b, p. 6)

Responses to the needs of children are applicable not only to examples of individual adult-child interaction; the same type of effort applies as well to the broader context of social and political responses. From a base of covert assumptions, overt policy decisions, and the laws of the land, each community, state, province, and nation has expressed its beliefs about and attitudes toward childhood by creating institutions whose responsibilities include providing for the protection of, provision for, and education of its future

citizens (Erikson, 1965; Roby, 1973; Steinfels, 1973; Young & Nelson, 1973). Historically, the institution holding the most power over child-rearing has been the family with additional input from other segments of society, such as religious congregations and voluntary organizations. Beyond the intimacy of the family and the social milieu of the community have emerged political institutions with roles to play in the rearing of children. Over time, authority over children has been continually modified by the increasingly powerful presence of the state (Abbott, 1938; Bailyn, 1960; Demos, 1970).

Perceptions of Childhood and the Historical Changes in Society and the Family. Children's needs have remained constant throughout western history. Responses, however, have varied, largely because of the different perceptions of childhood held by a given society at a particular time (Ariès, 1962; DeMause, 1974a). Views of childhood over time have fallen along a continuum:

* Children have been perceived as similar to or as different from adults;
* Children have been perceived as having little value to society or as having some or much value; and
* Children have been perceived as biologically determined or as a product of the social environment (Ariès, 1962; DeMause, 1974a; Kessen, 1965; Ranck, 1986; Rosenheim, 1973; Sears, 1975).

To the extent that parents and other adults have failed to respond appropriately to children's needs, it has been necessary for social and political intervention in order to heal the breakdown between adult and child. The emergence of laws pertaining to children in England reflected the practices that operated to protect both the vulnerable child and the liable community (Schroeder, 1938; Stubbs, 1884; Tierney, 1959). Likewise in America, the Plymouth Colony in

Massachusetts arranged for the care of the children when the family structure broke down through parental death or desertion (Demos, 1970).

Perceptions of childhood have varied over time because of the fundamental social and political changes that have taken place, most pertinently as medieval thought forms evolved into modern understandings of monarchy, the nature of government, and the structure of the state. The English Puritan Revolution, a major expression of these shifts, sought during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to integrate the religious authority of the period into the daily life of the people. One profound effect of the movement was to produce a drastic change in how the family and its individual members, including the young children, were viewed (Demos, 1970; Walzer, 1965).

In the rise of the modern state were the beginnings of an increased valuation of the child, and with it, the initial awareness that children needed socialization into a life beyond the biological group. As the home came to be viewed as the basic unit of the state, its function as child-rearer changed to allow the child to be more directly influenced by the larger institution. In time the home by itself became inadequate to meet the demands placed on the educative function of the family. As a result, some homes were set apart for use in schooling, and eventually the educational effort at the formal level for the most part moved out of the house entirely into a place designated specifically as a school (Ranck, 1986). As soon as parents were preceived as principal educators of their children within the orbit of the state, the ancient role of the church-related schools in the lives of the family and the community shifted to allow for a larger part to be played by the state. The expectations of Puritanism transformed the schools for a purpose that more

fully complemented their goals for society (Greaves, 1969; Walzer, 1965).

Development of Educational Programs for Young Children. Prior to the modern era, children learned what they needed to know within the confines of the home (Elkin & Handel, 1972; Tucker, 1974; Whalley, 1974), and parents learned about child-rearing from relatives and friends (Greven, 1977), and from correspondence with and the writings of prominent authors and philosophers such as Montaigne (1580/1958); Locke (Bourne, 1876); and J. J. Rousseau (1762/1979). Also during the seventeenth century, John Amos Comenius (1633/1858) published The School of Infancy in which he detailed the curriculum of a "maternal school" in which a mother would implement appropriate pedogogical techniques in order to teach children about aspects of the entire range of typical academic subjects.

If it can be said that Comenius proposed the "home as school," then it is possible to proced to another form of schooling, that of the "school as home" in which children were sent to the home of a skilled workers to be apprenticed to the master. Still another form of early schooling was the "dame school" or "infant school" which Cremin (1980) describes as "a quasi-domestic environment under the supervision of a quasi-maternal female teacher" (p. 389). Perhaps the best known example of a dame school was Pestalozzi's Gertrude, "the Good Teacher by whom alone the world is to be saved ... [from whom] love and devotion overflows from the domestic circle into the community" (G. H. Hall, cited in Pestalozzi, 1781/1898, p. ix).

In America, despite efforts to strengthen the role of the family in the education of the children, such as the early colonial Massachusetts laws of 1642 and 1647 (Commager, 1948), the presence of the public school emerged as

a major socializing and educative force in nineteenth and twentieth century society. In addition to the expansion of the public schools, there also developed efforts to provide for certain children formal educational experiences for young children under the age of six years (Beer, 1938, 1957; Fein & Clarke-Stewart, 1973: Steinfels, 1973; Swift, 1964; Tyson, 1938; Whipple, 1929).

A review of the literature describing the growth and development of preschools and child care centers in the United States soon suggests that early educational programs had a purpose above and beyond, perhaps even before, the nominal reason to educate young children (Greenblatt, 1977; Lazarson, 1972; Takanishi, 1977). These purposes have tended to focus on three themes:

* A means by which to accomplish social reform and to correct for conditions created by political and economic crisis;
* A means by which to create opportunities to assist mothers to change their role in the family and, therefore, to change the family itself; and
* A means by which to prepare children for roles as future public school pupils and as citizens in a democracy.

As a result of the shift of responsibility for child-rearing from the narrow world of the family to include the more publicly oriented institutions, the role of the family has expanded and the role of the state has simplified. In this process, a child care program may be seen as not only the "family writ large," but also as the "state writ small" (Ranck, 1986).

Equally true is the reality that the political and economic purposes cited above must now be considered a part of program development, in addition to the traditional components of a basic early education program that address the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive needs of children. As the

functions of child care arrangements have expanded, the themes of social reform and political imapct have become increasingly visible and influential in the formation and operation of programs, and, equally significantly, in the content and goals of public policies. The public element thus introduced into early childhood education does not eliminate the private, child-focused aspect of programming; rather, it brings it into a new and paradoxical relationship.

The Role of Politics in Early Childhood. Up to this point the following sources of historical knowledge about early childhood programs have been identified: children's basic developmental needs, adult perceptions of childhood, changes in society and the family, and the development of educational programs for young children. Legislation as a stable source of information about society's attitudes toward and beliefs about children has been mentioned as a key source of information, even though Americans have steadfastly resisted the intervention of government into the lives of children. Despite the resistance to such legislation, the shift of control over child-rearing has tended to move from the arena of the family outward, first toward private institutions andthen into the political system (Demos, 1970; White et al., 1973). Child-related policies presuppose a viable role for government in the protection of vulnerable populations in society; in the allocation of denial of scarce resources among eligible recipients; and in establishing standards for educational program for children of all ages, including those below the age of six years.

Statutes pertaining to children, like all laws, arise within the broader social and political context of a nation's existence, and are controlled by the limits set by the constitutions of the federal government and the various

states. Public law-making in a democracy entails a more intricate series of actions that a chronological "innovation-adoption-implementation" schema would suggest (Thomas, 1975, p. 8). In fact, complex planning and complicated procedures inherent in governing a large, pluralistic nation are particularly evident in the laws concerned with controversial social issues, such as those that affect education and other family-related concerns (Bailey & Mosher, 1968; Berman, 1966; Eidenberg & Morey, 1960; Redman, 1973; Thomas, 1975). Such issues as social goals may well be considered on their merits alone; however, political decisions are made on other criteria: "A major task of the political system is to specify goals" (Wildavsky, 1974, p. 191); and policy goals are set during the policymaking process, rather than prior to its inception. Such efforts produce "mixtures of values" in which "policies may determine goals at least as much as general objectives determine policies" (p. 192).

The mixture of values takes on special significance when decisions, such as those revolving around child care issues and the education of infants and toddlers, which are based on values, must favor one set of values over against another set. The implications of change-making decisions in a pluralistic society have predictable consequences:

> Because values sometimes conflict and because they sometimes compliment each other, those [values] actually relevant to policy choices are values of increment or decrement, that is, marginal value. (Braybrooke & Lindblom, 1970, p. 31)

Furthermore, changes made in the context of conflict, highly likely in a pluralistic society addressing controversial social issues, usually lead to

> [the] pursuit of incremental changes [in which] policy is directed toward specific ills--rather than toward comprehensive reform ... it is the pursuit of long-term changes through sequences of moves. (p. 74).

Given the nature of combined values, controversy, and policy changes, it is not surprising that socially-oriented policymaking for children's programs in the United States has tended toward ambiguous bits-and-pieces rather than unilateral and authoritarian decisions. Policymaking under such circumstances is characterized by small, incremental changes within a constant climate of ambiguity that tend toward limited yet persistent movement, rather than either a continuously even development or a wildly erratic fluctuation (Ranck, 1986).

To summarize, early childhood professionals in America have reached the end of a remarkable century faced with all of the components and possibilities of a national policy on child care and early education. Pieces from the past are ready to be put back into play once again, but without the combination of solid knowledge about children's developmental needs firmly fixed in the minds of policymakers and without the astute awareness and understanding of democratic governance and conceptions of pluralistic politics an inherent part of the strategies of early childhood professionals, disappointment, discouragement, and outright fury will persist. In order to pursue activities that can substitute instead celebration, encouragement, and outright enthusiasm, some unexamined underlying presuppositions about childhood and politics need to be identified.

Some Unexamined Underlying Presuppositions

1. The complexity of change and the nature of pluralism. At a recent statewide New Jersey conference on child health issues, a pediatric nurse prefaced her comment with the words "this is probably a naive question, but . . . ." Then she asked the big question: If it is obvious to almost everyone that young children

need to be kept safe, healthy, and cared for in a developmentally appropriate environment, why is it so difficult to write standards for early childhood programs? Why is it especially problematic to obtain national requirements?

The short answer is that individuals and groups of people perceive children in different ways and that their responses to those children's needs are based on the values held at a very deep philosophical level. People believe what they need to believe and this universal human condition dictates a range of possible actions. The United States was established to give opportunities to all kinds of people to express beliefs, therefore, in a pluralistic society, responses, including governmental responses, to children's needs rise out of incongruency. Life is a paradox and dilemmas confront us daily that are not resolved by an either/or. Instead, individuals and groups must search for a paradoxical condition within which consensus and agreement at a minimal level can take place.

2. <u>History is dull, boring, and irrelevant</u>. History with the word "story" imbedded within it is more than what happened yesterday or a thousand yesterdays ago. Too often what passes for history is only chronology. Without continual re-interpretation of documents events remain shrouded in cloudy obscurity, a set of facts without meaning for the present and implications for the future. History written by a Michael Kammen of Cornell, a Michael Walzer of Princeton, and a Bernard Bailyn of Harvard lives and enlivens our existence - it makes us real-ize the present and enables us to confront an unknown future with the tools to recommend and to evaluate. Our task as historians is the same as that of the professors whom I have just named - to find meaning in original documents and events.

3. Politics is "dirty", manipulative, and cynical. In a unified world children's programs would be excellent and desired by everyone, supported on their own merits. In a pluralistic democracy it is not the political way. What way shall be designated as the "good way?" At what level and in what arena will the definition of "quality child care and education" be hammered out? One reason for rejecting the political arenas is one of Lombardi's (1986) barriers to becoming advocates: the fear of the political process. Often such a fear is based on inaccuracies such as the following:

* elected officials and government officials know everything about current events, and what they know is right;
* ... are not interested in little children;
* ... are too busy to meet with me, are unapproachable, and don't read their mail anyway;
* ... are dependent on legislative aides and who wants to talk with a hired hand?

Considering a dictatorship as an alternative, politics in America is not as bad as it often is made out to be. Activity in politics has been an operating assumption in the United States for over 200 years, and some of the most committed workers have been persons who care greatly about children and families.

When these and other presuppositions are brought into the light of examination and confronted for half-true habitual statements, new light leads toward changed attitudes and activated behaviors both for early childhood advocates and for educators and caregivers working directly with children and families. I used to act on the belief that as long as somebody was advocating in the halls of Trenton or Springfield or Augusta or Tallahassee or Washington, like the lobbyists hired by corporations and special interest groups, others could keep

on working in center- and home-based programs, caring for and educating the children and parents. With the experience gained from working in state government and from supporting the ABC bill, I am changing that stance to one in which I believe that every single early education professional - assistant teacher to assistant professor - must become an active advocate, ready to speak out at any time and place on children's issues -- in a constructive, reasoned, and informed way.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to show early childhood historians how their field of study can promote advocacy activities in students and colleagues, and to show all educators and workers how a knowledge of their historical roots and their political context can enable them to become, not only capable advocates, but also more effective and successful in their work at whatever they may do for a living. The following lists are summaries of illustrations:

Promotion of Advocacy Activities. Become informed in your field by reading at least one article in one professional journal every week. Save articles from one newspaper or one magazine and share copies with colleagues and adversaries. Speak up as appropriate in the check-out line, the gas station, the restaurant, the dinner party, the laundromat, the bank. Respond constructively to one television program or one editorial or one speech about child care and preschool education. Give applause as well as criticism. Use past events as you learn about them to teach, not to solidify what has always been. Learn about strategies that worked in the past or in other fields and attempt to replicate them.

Becoming a More Effective and Successful Worker. Read "enjoyable history" such as Kammen, Bailyn, Tuchman and others. Monitor your written and spoken comments to register effectiveness. Become a mentor. Celebrate the victories over ignorance, inertia, and irritation. Hang on to your roots and your vision.

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